

Reporting from Washington— David Dreier, who chairs the House Rules Committee, has a seat at the GOP leadership table, helping set his party's legislative and political agenda. He has hobnobbed with all kinds of figures, from Afghan President Hamid Karzai to Tommy Lasorda, in his spiffy Capitol office.

He owns homes in Malibu, Rancho Mirage and his San Gabriel Valley district. And, as head of a panel that works to promote democracy abroad, he has traveled to such places as East Timor and Mongolia.

He seems to have everything — except a district to run in next year.

New political maps threaten to cost California political clout in Washington by placing Dreier's San Dimas home in inhospitable territory for a Republican and robbing some of the state's other senior House members of their job security.

"These districts are drawn without regard to incumbents or seniority in Washington," Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles) said in an interview. "As a result, both on the Democratic and Republican side, some of our senior people will be forced into costly and difficult election campaigns. Many of them won't return, which I think will hurt the clout of the state in a Congress where seniority matters."

Democratic-leaning California has enjoyed considerable influence in the House, oddly enough under Republican rule as well as under Democratic control, largely because of the seniority its members have accrued from running in safe districts. Four California Republicans chair House committees — more than any other state — and Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Bakersfield) holds his party's third-ranking job of majority whip.

California Democrats serve as ranking members of five committees, also more than any other state, and Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) is minority leader.

Under a redistricting drawn up by a new citizens commission, up to a dozen or more California House seats could be up for grabs next year in a state where one seat flipped between the parties in the last decade.

Dreier, a 30-year House veteran who in 1999 became the first Californian to chair the committee that decides which measures go to the House floor and how fast faces perhaps the most uncertainty. The plan places his home in a new Latino-majority district where Republican John McCain won just 33% in the 2008 presidential election.

Dreier, 59, has had little to say publicly about his plans. Some say he might run in a new GOP-friendly district, stretching from the Inland Empire communities of Highland and Yucaipa to rural Mono County, though Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-Redlands) is considering running there.

Dreier supports a petition drive to overturn the new congressional district lines. But his California House Republican colleagues are divided over a petition.

"I'm going to take a wait-and-see attitude," Dreier said in a recent interview. "Anybody who has come to the conclusion that these are the final lines that people will run in in June of next year may have another think coming."

But Dreier is a skilled fundraiser who has faced tough campaigns before. After his district was shifted almost entirely out of Los Angeles County in an earlier reapportionment, he stayed put in the San Gabriel Valley, running against fellow Republican Rep. Wayne Grisham in 1982 and winning.

Other senior Californians at risk include Rep. Howard L. Berman, top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He faces a tough race against fellow Democratic Rep. Brad Sherman in a new San Fernando Valley district. Republican Reps. Dan Lungren, who chairs the Committee on House Administration, and Elton Gallegly, chairman of the House immigration subcommittee, also face tough races. And Republican Reps. Ed Royce and Gary Miller are headed for a fight in the same new district.

While California's 53-member delegation is the largest in the House, its influence is often diminished by its diverse personalities and political views.

Still, Dreier and Lewis, a former House Appropriations Committee chairman, recently showed how their seniority — and long-cultivated friendships — can benefit the state. They persuaded a key committee chairman to keep federal funds flowing to California to help pay for jailing illegal immigrants despite the pressure to rein in federal spending.

"When politicians have been in D.C. for a long time, they learn the unofficial rules of the game and can play power politics more effectively than junior members," said John J. Pitney Jr., a government professor at Claremont McKenna College.

But opportunities for the lawmakers to use their clout to steer money to their home state has diminished with Republicans determined to get rid of Washington's red ink.

**Rep. John Campbell** (R-Irvine) doesn't think that seniority alone will determine the state's influence, pointing to McCarthy's rise to the GOP's No. 3 position in only his third term.

**"I'm not sure that if there is a little new blood, that that's going to hurt,"** he said.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, of San Jose and chairwoman of the California Democratic caucus, remarked, "It's widely recognized that Republican House members from California vote their ideology over the needs of California."

David Wasserman, House editor of the Washington-based Cook Political Report, suggested that California voters, in putting citizens instead of politicians in charge of redistricting, weren't as concerned about the seniority of its House members.

"What incumbents saw as clout, voters saw as entrenchment," he said.

Lungren cautioned against predictions of doom for Republicans like himself.

"When I was first elected, it was in a district that was considered to be a safe Democratic district," Lungren said, recalling his first election to the House in 1978. "I remember when the incumbent held a big party because they had gone over 55% registration....I ended up beating the incumbent by 10 points."